

Healthwatch Bucks update report

March 2024

This report includes the results of a snapshot survey we recently undertook on access to NHS dentistry in Buckinghamshire, alongside a breakdown of feedback on dentistry that we heard from Buckinghamshire residents over the past two years.

Snapshot survey: Access to NHS Dentistry in Buckinghamshire

Aim of survey

To get an understanding of how many dental practices, with existing NHS contracts, were able to see 'new' NHS patients.

What we did

Between 16th and 20th March 2024 we contacted 63 dental practices in Bucks by phone. We asked the following questions:

- Were they able to see any children (17 or under) as a new NHS patient
- Were they able to see any adult as a new NHS patient
- Were they able to see any new NHS patients with an exemption certificate
- Were they able to see any new NHS patient who had a referral

What we found

We spoke with 54 out of the 63 dental practices we called. We attempted to contact all practices a maximum of 3 times.

Of the 53 dental practices we did speak with:

- 31 answered 'Yes' to one or more of the four questions
- 23 practices were unable to see any new NHS patients and answered 'No' to all questions.

Of the 31 practices that said they could see a new NHS patient we found the following:

- 27 could see a child *
- 12 could see an adult
- 18 could see someone entitled to free dental care ('exempt')
- 11 could take a medical referral.

**It varies between practices as to the age they would see a child. One practice said it would see children until they were 16 whilst others expressed that they would see them under their NHS contract until they were 18, so long as they were in full time education.*

A couple of practices would only take on new children as NHS patients if their parents were a private patient within that practice.

- Nine practices answered 'Yes' to all our questions. A further three said 'Yes' they could see children and adults, but were unsure about exempt or referral patients.
- Three practices were only able to see those with an exemption certificate.

Practices that said 'No' to one or more questions were asked if they had a waiting list that people could be put on to get an NHS appointment. 10 practices said they did have a waiting list. Waiting list times varied from 3 months to 4 years.

Comparing what we found to the NHS "find a dentist" website

We looked at all 63 practices on the "find a dentist" website on 20th March 2024.

<https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-dentist>

We found that against 22 practices the following message could be seen:

"This dentist surgery has not given a recent update on whether they're taking new NHS patients. You can contact them directly to ask."

We compared the 54 practices answers we heard with the messaging that was on the NHS find a dentist website.

- 16 practices that we spoke to did have the same information on the NHS website as we heard.
- 38 practices gave us different information, or had out of date information on the NHS for the website.

Geographical differences

The table below shows, by area, the number of practices we spoke to who are taking on new NHS patients.

Region	Town	Children	Adults	Exempts	Referrals
North	Aylesbury	3	0	6	2
	Buckingham	0	0	0	0
	Princes Risborough	1	0	0	0
Central	Amersham	6	2	3	2
	Beaconsfield	1	1	1	0
	Chesham	2	0	0	0
	Great Missenden	0	0	0	0
	High Wycombe	7	5	4	4
South	Burnham	1	1	1	1
	Denham & Farnham Common	3	2	2	2
	Iver	1	0	0	0
	Gerrards Cross & Chalfonts	1	1	1	1
	Marlow	0	0	0	0

Voices Summary Dentistry

From 05/01/2022 to 27/01/2024

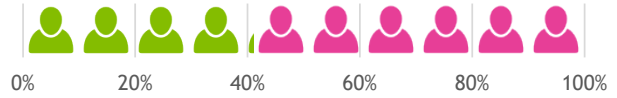
Voices Heard

100

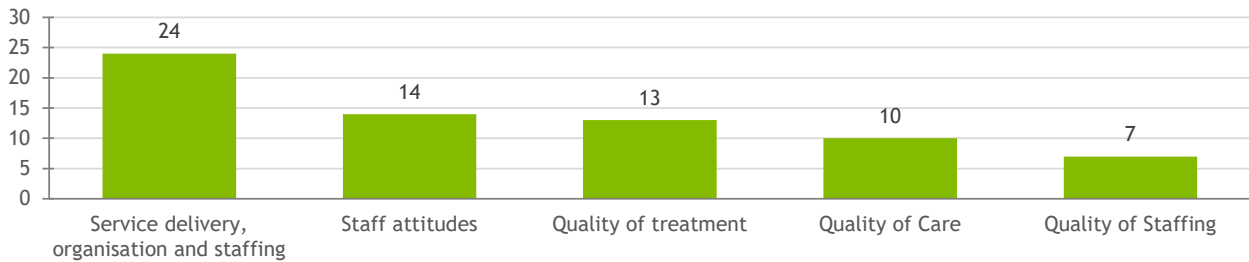
Feedback elements

198

Positive vs Negative



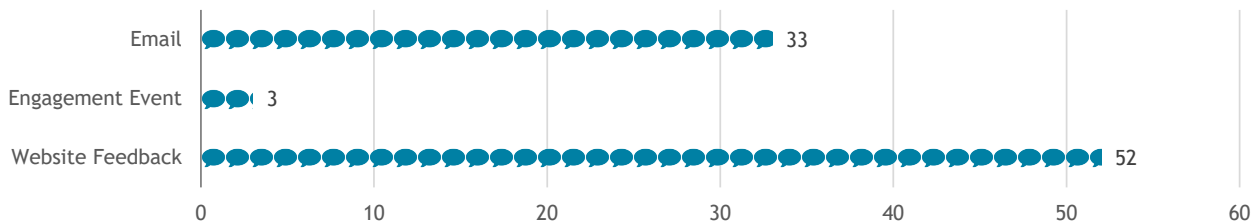
Top 5 Positive Themes



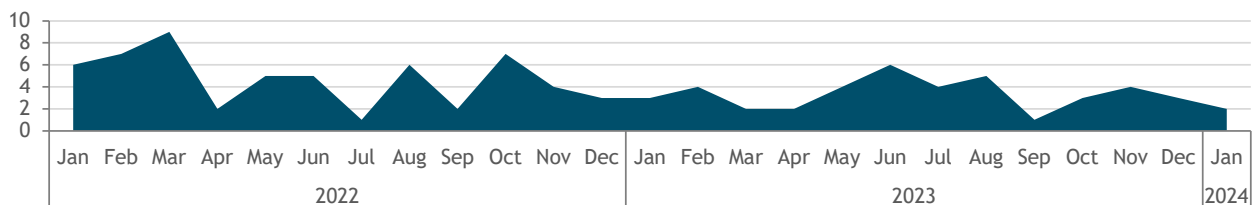
Top 5 Negative Themes



Source



Comments per month



As the chart illustrates we hear feedback from Buckinghamshire residents via a range of sources, including online, by phone, email and face to face.

People tell us;

- They struggle to find an NHS dentist. This includes long term residents and people new to the area. People who are able to find a practice accepting NHS patients say they are, in some cases, having to travel long distances to access one.
- That the information on the NHS 'find a dentist' website is not always consistent with what they hear from dental practices.
- That there is confusion about whether there is a 'right to register' with a dentist.